critical digest

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The Weekly That Keeps You Informed of the Current Broadway Critical Scene

Magazine Critics Rate the New Revue

Peep Show-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Trade paper critics agreed that Mike Todd's musical revue will be commercial smash. Hobe, Variety, considered it uneven entertainment with some negative spots, while Francis, Billboard, thought it was perfect for what it was trying to do. Keating, Cue, and Bolton, Morning Telegraph, raved. Latter loved show which reminded him of 1925 girl, giggle and guffaw items. News magazine critics plus Marshall, Nation, and Gibbs, New Yorker, panned the show for being downright dull. Peiro Brothers juggling act continued to draw top notices, with Bobby Clark's takeoff on 'The Cocktail Party' close behind. Neither songs nor dances came in for much praise or blame. Time critic summed up dissenters view with 'cupboard almost as bare as its chorines.'

Three More Views of Theatre-in-the Round

Three more pro votes can be recorded for Heilweil-Thomas Theatre-in-the-round production of Julius Caesar at the Arena Theatre in the Hotel Edison. Marshall, Nation, was very much impressed with both the timeliness of the Shakespeare classic and by the general tone of the entire production. She wonders why man hasn't followed the Bard's clear thoughts on the workings of the political mind. To remedy this situation she suggested a "Public Shakespeare Club" to meet yearly in Yankee Stadium to witness a production of this play. Keating, Cue, and Chrisler, Christian Science Monitor agreed that Basil Rathbone looked and acted his role as Cassius very well. Though Keating did think some of the acting was more like Group Theatre efforts than Roman Senators.

Summer Theatre Tryouts

Two new short plays shown for the first time in America were presented at Woodstock, N.Y. by the Margaret Webster Company. Giraudoux' The Apollo of Bellac, a new play adapted by Pierre Garai, and Fortunato by the Quinteros and adapted by Helen and Harley Granville Barker won the applause of Medo, Variety and Rice, Post. Apollo, which sets forth the premise that a girl can achieve any goal by merely telling men they are beautiful, features Miss Webster, while Fortunate, the story of a hero who has been a coward all his life, features Eva Le Gallienne. Both are staged by Miss Webster. Variety critic thought latter was high spot, while Rice favored the Giraudoux play. They agreed that acting in the company was tops...Francis, Billboard, and Stern, Show Business, agree with other critics that A.B.Shiffrin's Angel in a Pawnshop, which tried out at Westport, Connecticut is a good bet for Broadway.

Guest Column Time

Shirley Booth, star of Come Back, Little Sheba filled George Jean Nathan's "Theatre Week" space with delightful ramblings. She admits she is the play's best press agent, anyone who doesn't like it lacks sensitivity. William Inge, the author, will be one of our ablest playwrights, she predicts. And she admits that the reviews affect her, a sour notice frizzles her gizzard...Gertrude Lawrence used Dorothy Kilgallen's "Voice of Broadway" space to publicly thank Professor MacMullen of UCLA, who taught the British actress how to speak with a southern accent in "The Glass Menagerie".

Report on London - Continued

Most of the good plays viewed by Clurman, New Republic, during his London stay were revivals. This gave him the impression that the theatre there was an agreeable and lively curiosity shop in which the past was made delightfully present. He did enjoy James Bridie's new play, Mr Gillie, well acted and directed by Alastair Sims.

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' The Green Room Department '

YUGO DRAMA CRITICS...American critics shy away from direct contact with actors and producers for fear of being tainted. But drama critics in Yugoslavia give their opinions directly to players and producers at conferences after the opening night, Viola Ellis reports in the British semi-weekly Theatre News Letter. Reasoned criticism is listened to with genuine interest and complete lack of touchiness. Actors are civil servants, paid on yearly basis.

TIP TO HURTAGH...The producer of a current show, hints Sylvester, News, has levied fees against the ticket brokers for last minute money for his previous production. The producer raised $60,000; the brokers feared they wouldn't get tickets for his new show. One did balk, the producer still owed him money from the last show.

BROADWAY'S NEWEST COLUMNIST...Persistence and ingenuity are the keys to Hy Gardner's landing his "Early Bird on Broadway" column which started this week in the "Early Bird" editions of the Herald Tribune. Columnist and press agent had samples of his column set up in 18 point type. For a month he mailed copies to the homes of the top executives of the paper. Dateline was "Dry Run, Pa."

STINKERS ON TV...The bundle of 57 musical shows signed for TV production by Bernard Schubert contains an even half dozen stinkers, says O'Brian, Journal American. The columnist had the displeasure to review them when he was UP drama critic, and they shouldn't happen to a ten inch tube.

ECONOMY NO SUB...Economy is no substitute for talent in the legitimate theatre, Morrison, Variety, surmises after looking over the records of the past two seasons. Extreme dearth of strong scripts, good directors, and star players with box office appeal is evidenced. Production costs have never halted a good script from Broadway try, though many poor scripts have been staged.

REVERSE PUBLICITY...If you read about a lady press agent for an off-Broadwaygroup committing hari kari, Rice, Post, can explain the story. Seems he was coaxed by said female to attending an opening to view three painful, dreary acts. He wrote a review, but didn't mention name of group, players, play or press agent. The suicide may come after the girl reads his notice.

"PEEP" PRICES...People will come to see a good show no matter what the price is a conviction of Mike Todd, relays Lyons, Post. Peep Show has $7.20 top. To prove his point to the late Brock Pemberton he had the producer of Harvey call ten prominent theatre goers to ask if they remembered what the ticket price to the hit was. One of those called was a Variety editor. Not one remembered the price. Story didn't say how many paid for their tickets.

BIG BUSINESS' CHANCE...RCA has put $250,000 into Irving Berlin's Call Me Madam and Esso has backed touring junket of Barter Theatre. These are good signs in days when TV gobbles up everything in sight, points out editorial in Printer's Ink. Advertising trade publication hopes that big business will also take some calculated risks in show business.

"SALESMEN" RECORDS...Decca does civilization a service by offering recordings of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman, comments Pollock, Compass. The original cast made the record, though Thomas Mitchel plays the lead. Miller's "On the Nature of Tragedy" accompanies the album.

' Critical Notes '

World-Telegram & Sun strike in fourth week. Management claim 90 workers are crossing picket lines of CIO Newspaper Guild daily. Strikers are sponsoring news programs on Stations WLIB and WFDR-FM daily.

' Summer Theatres '

The Poor Nut, starring Lon McCallister in the 1920 J.C.& Elliott Nugent comedy started its straw hat tour at Sea Cliff, Long Island. McDonald, Billboard, thinks it is natural to be a silo success. Oldsters can reminisce, kids can see what parents have been praising. Cast is just about perfect...Cragsmoor Playhouse, New York, opened with Moss Hart's Light Up the Sky. Garland, Journal American, thought the warm direction by Marjorie Hildreth turned the gag comedy into an entertaining play.. Zachary Scott received a fine notice for his role in Blind Alley, the revival making the tour of the Subway Circuit, from Sheaffer, Eagle, while critic thought staging by Loy Nilson could have been brisker, he found melodrama is still exciting.

Every summer Rice, Post, travels hundreds of miles covering summer theatres. Judging from his experiences during the first two weeks of this season, he thinks this may be his favorite year. He has had plenty of laughs, thanks to the unintentional incidents provided onstage by two stock companies. A wonderfully phony English accent, a stage tea party with actors madly waving empty teacups, an actress frantically struggling with her gloves, the actor who showed the soles of his shoes to the audience, and the actress who started moving onstage furniture every time she forgot her line are items he will remember.

' Interview Round Up '

JOHN GOLDEN...It doesn't make sense to have a 20 per cent wartime theatre ticket tax on something we all know to be a necessity, the 76 year old producer told WNBC Mary Margaret McBride. Golden is conducting a campaign to get it cut in half. He has enlisted the aid of Congressman Franklin D. Roosevelt, Jr.

MARGARET PHILLIPS...Sole cloud on horizon for new co-star of The Cocktail Party is that producers have typed her as the spurned woman, she complained to Keating, Cue. She would like to play a happy part for a change.

MR. AND MRS. CHARLES MacArthur...We were born to be domestic, Helen Hayes told Robb, Journal American. While the public has cast her husband as a fantastic screwball playwright, editor and producer, she bills him as a most dependable spouse. They have no recipe for their 22 year old marriage, they just improvise as they go.

BLANCHE YURKA...Greek plays are the favorites of the famous star, she admitted on WCB TV Joyce Matthews. She listed only four Greek plays as being in the class of truly great plays.

HEILWEIL & THOMAS...Producers of Arena Theatre pointed out a new selling point for theatre-in-the-round to Wahls, News. Central staging has the intimacy of a television show, they said. Top advantage is the saving in setting. The sets for their shows at the Edison average $500, while similar regular productions would cost just $15,000 for the sets alone.

ESTELLE WINWARD...Temperament is always involved where there is a good performance the co-star of The Madwoman of Chaillot told WPIX Danton Walker. Though it is better to be exciting and temperamental, it is no good to have temperament without talent.

' News & Notes '

Walter Kerr, author of two Broadway hits Touch and Go and Sing Out, Sweet Land, has been named drama critic of The Commonwealth. The former director and founder of the Catholic University Theater in Washington, D. C. replaces Kappo Phelan who resigned recently.

' Key to NYC Criticism At A Glance '

Shows are rated as to how the critics liked them, not if they think they will be hits. "So-So" means the critic did not state directly if he recommended the show for an entertaining or stimulating evening.

1. NY Times
2. NY Herald Tribune
3. NY News
4. NY Mirror
5. NY Compass (PM, Star)
6. NY Post
7. NY Sun (Morehouse)
8. NY Journal American
9. NY World Telegram and Sun
10. Brooklyn Eagle
11. Newark News
12. Women's Wear Daily
13. Daily Worker
14. Wall Street Journal
15. Journal of Commerce
16. George Jean Nathan
17. Morning Telegraph
18. Variety
19. Billboard
20. Theatre Arts
21. Catholic World
22. Commonweal
23. Cue
24. Chr.Sci.Monitor
25. Sat.Review Lit.
26. Newsweek
27. Time
28. Nation
29. New Republic
30. New Yorker

The Cocktail Party-Miller, 1/2/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 2-9-14-22-25-29. So-So: 16-30. None: 13.

Come Back, Little Sheba-Booth, 2/15/50. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 2-4-7-12-21-27. So-So: 3-6-30. None: 13-15-24-25-28.

The Consul-Barrymore, 3/15/50. Pro: 27 votes. Con: 22. So-So: 6-29.

Death of a Salesman-Morosco, 2/10/49. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. So-So: 27.

Detective Story-Broadhurst, 3/23/49. Pro: 21 votes. None: 5-10-11-13-16-24-28-29

Gentlemen Prefer Blondes-Ziegfeld, 12/8/49. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 6-21-28. So-So: 16-19-22-23-27. None: 25.

The Happy Time-Plymouth, 1/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 5-6-7-20-26-27-28-30.

Kiss Me, Kate-Century, 12/31/48. Pro: 28 votes. Con: 29. None: 28.

The Member of the Wedding-Empire, 1/5/50. Pro: 26 Pro: Con: 16. So-So: 2-27-30.

Mister Roberts, Alvin, 2/13/48. Pro: 24 votes. Con: 21-24. So-So: 13-16-17.

Peep Show-Winter Garden, 6/28/50. Pro: 4-5-6-8-10-11-15-17-19-23. Con: 1-2-12-26-27-28-30. So-So: 3-14-18.

Peter Pan-Imperial, 4/24/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 8-16-30. So-So: 6-14-19.

South Pacific-Majestic, 4/8/49. Pro: 19 votes. Con: 27. So-So: 23.

Texas Li'l Darlin'-Hellinger, 11/25/50. Pro: 12 votes. Con: 1-4-7-8-19-19-23-29-30. So-So: 2-5-10-11-20-26-27. None: 25-28.

Where's Charley?-St. James, 10/11/48. Pro: 16 votes. Con: 6-7-12-13-16-19-22-24-25-26. So-So: 4-27. None: 10-28.

The Wisteria Trees -Martin Beck, 3/29/50. Pro: 15 votes. Con: 2-7-9-10-16-22-23-25-26-27-28-30. So-So: 18-29. None: 13.

Tickets Please!-Coronet, 4/27/50. Pro: 21 votes. Con: 11-16-29-30. So-So: 26.